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CRITICAL NOTICES.

Faith and Experience. Essays and Addresses by OSWALD JOHN SIMON.
(London, 1895.)

MR. SIMON'S small volume, *Faith and Experience*, merits in more respects than one, a reviewer's praise. But its chief value lies, perhaps, in its purely devotional and religious elements. We have painfully few devotional and religious books in our modern Anglo-Jewish literature. And yet we need such books at least as much as any other community. Owing to the lack of them many persons who have some genuine appreciation or experience of personal religion turn for solace, stimulus and guidance to the many scores of such productions which owe their origin to the varying forms and phases of Christianity. It is quite possible that Judaism on this account suffers undeserved and serious injury. For it may be too lightly imagined that the Jewish religion is not capable of calling forth or of supplying the experience which these writings demand. It may be thought that Judaism is only a communal or race religion, but that it does not lend itself readily to that, as many believe, highest expression of religious activity which concerns the individual man in his personal relations with God.

Mr. Simon's book gives the lie to such misapprehensions. His devotion to Judaism is no less marked than his championship of the cause of personal religion. Nay, more : his personal religion is the outflow of his Judaism. To him the two are inseparably united together.

This identification is precisely what is needed in works of this class. Not that Mr. Simon is without his reasons for believing that Judaism affords the best training and teaching for the exercise and experience of personal religion, but these reasons occupy a secondary place. Books of devotion are not books of learned argument, and they are primarily intended for the religious community to which their writers belong. They rightly assume a belief in the superior excellence and purity of the religion which is their framework. To Mr. Simon that framework is Judaism.

His book consists of a number of Essays and Sermons, only a few of which have been printed before—two of them in the pages of this Review. One or two items, such as the essays on Tact and on Denominational Schools, seem slightly out of place in a whole, for which otherwise the phrase "*Faith and Experience*" forms an adequate and satisfactory

title. Our author, moreover, is almost uniformly at his best when dealing with purely religious topics. On the other hand, many of us will be glad to re-read the obituary notice on the late Master of Balliol, which concludes the volume. Mr. Simon, like many another, owed much to the kindness as well as to the teaching of Jowett. He was one of his most devoted and appreciative admirers. It deserves to be known, that the "round robin" which a number of Balliol men addressed to the Master in the year 1892, asking him to publish a selection of his sermons, was entirely due to the inspiration and initiative of Mr. Simon. Though at that time the Master felt unable to comply with the request, he has, I believe, given his literary executors power to publish a volume of his sermons, which he would not have done, had he not been almost compelled by the "round robin" to realise how deeply his pulpit utterances were valued. We shall, therefore, owe the preservation of these noble discourses to Mr. Simon.

I said just now that the words "Faith" and "Experience" were an accurate and suggestive summing-up of Mr. Simon's essays. I was especially thinking of the second of the two substantives, *experience*. By experience Mr. Simon means religious experience—religion as realised in experience. For to him religious experience is as real as any other experience; or, put the other way, religion is hardly real till it is experienced. And that is why religion to him is mainly personal religion; for these experiences are only realisable by and through the individual soul, and at the same time need of necessity no other accessory or environment. And here I must again repeat that we Jews are in great need of books from men or women to whom religion means just *that*, and who can record with adequate terseness and ability the impressions and results of this spiritual experience. Mr. Simon is one of those persons, and therefore his book has a notable and even peculiar value. Its dedication indicates that the author's experience has been partly gained by sorrow; and, from a touching and striking allusion on p. 23, the reader can gather that Mr. Simon has had much time for meditation and thought. He has not been too busy to think and feel; he has not been too busy to pray. And by prayer I mean what he means; not the reading of prescribed and printed prayers of others, but free personal communion with God (pp. 95, 96). Through prayer he has won experience:—

A person who knows himself to have passed through the experience of prayer—that is, to have felt that he was once in communion with the Deity—may reasonably regard the evidence of a Divine Presence as a matter of experience, and therefore independent of the testimony of others (p. 28).

Whether reasonably or no I will not inquire, but that all great religious writers and all truly religious persons would echo the statement is surely

certain. Hence it is that Mr. Simon is so wholly independent of the results of Biblical criticism ; they do not really matter to him and to his religion one bit. Nor, as he thinks, do they matter to Judaism. He combines this experienced religion with Judaism, and believes that the one is the very product and outflow of the other.

"We have a faith which is an experience, and we have to tell of our experience ; in other words, we bear witness of God" (p. 81). He is quite indifferent whether the Biblical miracles happened or not : personally, as I gather, he does not believe in them. "We speak only of a record of a vast human experience in the necessity and the efficacy of a life with God" (p. 82). "The genius of Judaism is that it is a story of natural religion, of spiritual aspiration among individuals and families through a long series of ages" (p. 92). Mr. Simon should better forswear the use of the adjective "natural," as applied to religion, for nobody knows without elaborate explanations what sense any particular writer chooses to give to it. It is as elastic as the vocabulary of Humpty Dumpty. But what Mr. Simon apparently means is that this "personal life with God" has been proved and tested and experienced by countless individual Jews through many generations, and that Judaism is therefore the record and the proof of the validity and the value of these experiences. This is, I think, a novel and most suggestive idea.

Into the contents of the various essays I cannot enter. I hope that Mr. Simon may do much further work, either of this character or, if I may be allowed the expression, *still more so*. I mean, may he be still more purely religious, spiritual, devotional. He might, after a time, be able to produce for Jewish religious life a volume of religious aphorisms and maxims such as Mr. Patmore has lately produced for the Catholics. There are several specimens of the kind in the volume before us. Such are the following, which I pick out at random :—

"There is no prayer which is so blessed as the prayer which asks for nothing" (p. 13).

"One might almost describe the two kinds of loneliness thus :—One brings merely the consciousness of self, the other the consciousness of God" (p. 17).

"It rests with us [Jews] to elect between archæology and religion" (p. 105).

"Jews must be spiritual persons, or their very name is meaningless" (p. 136).

"Judaism is a missionary religion, or it is nothing" (p. 137).

"The relation between the divine and human is not merely general, but is essentially personal" (p. 84).

"Almighty God—who is surely our Father, or else we are not concerned with him—has mystically determined that he shall become manifest to us through the feelings, through the affections, through a divine untold

love. That is why the head corner-stone of Judaism is the command to love God with all the powers of our being " (p. 185 *fin.*).

"It is the personal and secret conviction treasured up in one soul after another, receiving constant renewal by prayer, that makes up the sum of human witness to our affinity with the living God " (p. 203).

"Faith, love, and sorrow are three elements that mysteriously blend in human experience, each having its own tale to tell of the relation which we bear to the Supreme Being" (p. 204).

Sermons such as those entitled "The Divine Presence" and "Higher Judaism " are excellent reading ; but I should give a wrong impression of Mr. Simon's book if it were to be supposed that it does not deal with the religious life of the community as well as with the religious life of the individual. Mr. Simon has very definite opinions, and knows how to express them. He does not attempt to obscure his position in the camp of the Reformers ; but yet his conception of Reform has many characteristics of its own. Both sides would do well to consider his words and weigh them well. It is to be hoped that his book will have many readers within our borders. I am pretty confident that it will have many beyond them. The outer world is possibly more interested in certain phases and developments of Judaism than the Jewish community itself.

C. G. MONTEFIORE.

As Others Saw Him : A Retrospect, A.D. 54. London, 1895.

This is a striking and suggestive little book. The writer proposes to describe Jesus from the point of view of a thoughtful Jew living in Jerusalem. He accordingly assumes the person of Meshullam ben Zadok, a lawyer in the Holy City, whom he identifies with the Synoptics' questioner about the great commandment in the Law. Meshullam subsequently removes to Alexandria, and some one-and-twenty years after the crucifixion records his reminiscences for the benefit of a Greek physician, Aglaophonos, of Corinth, whom he had formerly known in Jerusalem. The choice of this form of narrative imposes obvious restraints ; but it also gives opportunity for the introduction of plenty of local colour which is often very happily employed. At times, indeed, this seems somewhat superfluous ; readers of the type for whom the book is intended might be supposed to be already acquainted with the interior arrangements of a synagogue (p. 34). In some details, its accuracy might be doubted. Was the doctrine of a Messiah who should precede the Son of David, Messiah ben Joseph (p. 116), really pre-Christian ? Occasional lapses into modern style betray some of the